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Meadowlands “Report Card” Shows Master Plan Implementation A Success

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The Meadowlands Master Plan is being implemented successfully according to the long-awaited Strategic Review of the Meadowlands Master Plan, which was submitted to the Board of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today at the direction of NJMC Chair and NJ Department of Community Affairs Acting Commissioner Susan Bass Levin.

“This report shows that after two years of working hard to implement the Meadowlands Master Plan, this Board has done wonders,” said Commissioner Levin. “The Board has acquired or otherwise seen to the preservation of 987 acres of previously unprotected land. The NJMC has targeted 1,027 acres for habitat enhancement. Five new waterside parks have either been opened or have entered the development process. A convention and visitors bureau has been opened. Eight of our 14 District municipalities are benefiting from redevelopment sites. Affordable housing is moving forward in the District.”

The Strategic Review of the Meadowlands Master Plan covers the last two years of policymaking since the Meadowlands Master Plan was approved by the Board in January 2004. According the report, the NJMC achieved or exceeded 23 of the 28 selected goals the agency set for itself in the first two years. Progress was made in all five of the Master Plan’s “systems,” the natural environment, economic development, transportation, housing, community facilities, with particular gains made in the natural environment. Where goals were met or exceeded, the report establishes new goals for the coming years.

The Master Plan calls for the conservation of the 8,400-acre Meadowlands urban wetlands ecosystem, the transformation of areas that are polluted or blighted into strong points of economic and community-oriented growth, and setting the stage for redevelopment with a potential market value of \$5.6 billion and the creation of 56,250 new permanent jobs. It marks the conclusion of a previous 30-year period of land use conflict in which stakeholders in the Meadowlands could not agree on a common vision for the District.

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“Not only is this an opportunity to measure how well we’ve done so far, but it’s an opportunity to set new goals for the future,” said NJMC Commissioner Michael Gonnelli. “This agency is investing \$13.7 million into our municipalities, another \$14 million in the environment, and sizable amounts into the economy and our own capital improvement. If we maintain this track record we will continue to see the multiplying benefits for our residents.”

As required by the Master Plan, the report and future annual editions measure the NJMC’s progress in executing the strategies established by the Meadowlands stakeholders including environmental groups, municipal leaders and the business community. It is considered a unique tool, since the agency has never been required to report on progress made on a Master Plan in the past.

“It is rare for an agency to make an accounting of its progress like this,” said NJMC Executive Director Robert Ceberio. “This is another example of the new importance this agency places on communicating with its stakeholders and maintaining an open process.”

In future editions of the report, a broad range of studies and analysis - currently underway by the Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute, Institute for Meadowlands Studies, and other groups – will provide even more precise measurements of progress.

Commissioner Levin has now directed that the report be taken into the Meadowlands communities for a series of three listening sessions, which will help the agency better understand the needs of residents and District stakeholders. The results will be reported back to the Board within one month and incorporated in the annual Strategic Review, due back to the Board in January 2007.

The NJMC will announce the locations and dates of the three sessions in the coming weeks.

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